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ABSTRACT

A research project studied the impact of study support on students at the upper secondary level and on adult students in Sweden. Project activities at the upper secondary level began with a survey charting social recruitment for the three- and four-year lines of upper secondary school. Measures proposed to counteract the increasing social bias of recruitment included giving priority for study support to students from economically disadvantaged groups. A survey showed that the student grant did not influence students to enter the two- or three- or four-year lines. A majority of students found the grant financially important to their families. The part of the project concerned with adult study assistance first reviewed information and data and found that special adult study assistance has had a positive impact on the recruitment of undereducated persons, especially women; hourly study assistance has not had a positive impact on recruitment; and rules for adult study assistance need to be made more flexible. A study of the utilization of special adult study assistance found most recipients have been undereducated, the assistance generally offset the loss of earnings, and only 50 percent drew the loans to which they were entitled. (YLB)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH Newsletter

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SEPTEMBER 1984 | FIELD - SUBJECT | 1984:7
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Study assistance
Adult study assistance

TITLE OF PROJECT

STUDY ASSISTANCE AND ADULT STUDY ASSISTANCE - UTILISATION AND EFFECTS

The past 20 years have seen a heavy expansion of public spending on financial benefits for students and heavy amounts are now being disbursed every year in the form of student benefits of various kinds. The regulations are changing all the time, and questions of student finance are often a topic of vigorous public debate.

- How do the various kinds of study support operate in practice?
- Do they reach the groups they are primarily intended for?
- Do they have the intended effect on educational recruitment?
- Are benefits large enough to finance studies?
- What changes are most urgently needed and how are the various forms of support to be changed in order to optimise goal achievement?

These are some of the questions we are trying to answer in the research project STUDY ASSISTANCE AND ADULT STUDY ASSISTANCE - UTILISATION AND EFFECTS.

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Background and purpose

In 1964 the Riksdag (i.e. the Swedish Parliament) introduced a system of State study support which was to be accessible to practically everybody who continued their education after compulsory school. This support came to be termed study assistance at upper secondary level and loan-grant assistance at post-secondary level. Since its introduction, the system has been modified in certain respects, but its essential principles have remained the same. On the other hand, study support for adults was introduced in 1975, to provide educational opportunities above all for those whose previous education had been limited to the unreformed elementary school or its equivalent.

During the years that have followed the implementation of the reforms of student finance, very large sums of money have been disbursed but extremely few studies have been made of the effects of these socio-economic inputs. The project FINANCIAL AID AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION was launched in 1980 with the aim of acquiring information on this point. That project was conducted at the Department of Education, University of Göteborg, with grants from the Swedish Council for Planning and Co-ordination of Research and the National Board of Universities and Colleges. For further information concerning this project, reference is made to Reuterberg & Svensson (1983).

As the name of the project implies, it was concerned solely with the impact of study support on post-secondary studies. In order to obtain similar information concerning the effect of support on students at upper secondary level and on adult students, a research project entitled STUDY ASSISTANCE AND ADULT STUDY ASSISTANCE - UTILISATION AND EFFECTS was begun in 1982. This project, which is being funded by the National Board of Education (NBE) and the Central Study Assistance Committee, is aimed at answering two basic questions:

1. How has study assistance affected different student categories as regards recruitment for and success in upper secondary school?

2. To what extent have the groups for whom the 1975 adult education reform was mainly intended actually been reached and what have been the effects of education on persons availing themselves of the various forms of study support?

State study assistance is paid to upper secondary school students aged between 16 and 20. This assistance includes a non-means-tested student grant and a means-tested and needs-tested supplement. In addition, travel supplements, boarding allowances and repayable study assistance are also obtainable on certain conditions.

The main forms of adult study support with which our inquiries are concerned are special adult study assistance (awarded for long-term studies) and hourly and daily study assistance, which is awarded for studies of shorter duration.

Study assistance at upper secondary level

Project activities at upper secondary level began with a survey (Svensson, 1983) aimed at charting social recruitment for the 3- and 4-year lines of upper secondary school today, together with the changes which have taken place since State study assistance was first introduced in the mid-1960s. This survey includes nationally representative samples of students born in 1948, 1953, 1958 and 1963, each annual cohort being represented by about 10,000 individuals.

The survey shows that admissions to 3- and 4-year lines increased rapidly during the late 1960s. At that time too, the increase was heavier in lower than in higher social classes, which meant a reduction of social differences. Since then, however, growth has stagnated in social classes II and III, while continuing in class I, with the result that social gaps have once more widened (see Figure 1). The survey report ends with a discursive section in which various measures are proposed in order to counteract the increasing social bias of recruitment. One such measure is a reinforcement of study support in such a way as to give priority to students from economically disadvantaged groups.

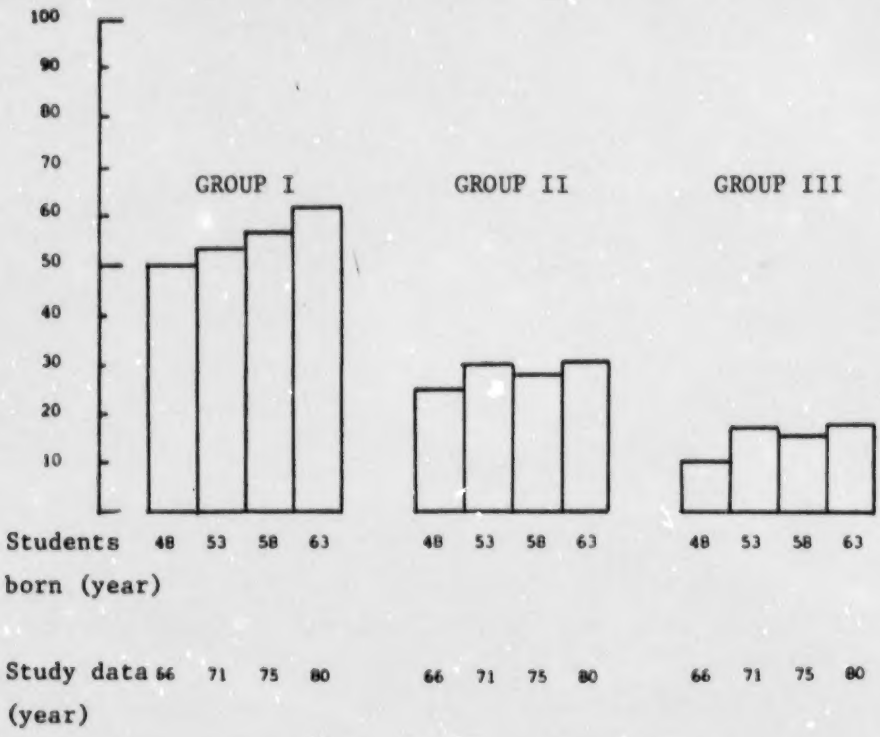

Figure 1. Percentages of pupils from various social classes opting for 3- or 4-year upper secondary school studies. A comparison between the classes of 1948, 1953, 1958 and 1963.

Students born in 1963 have been followed up by the Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB) and among other things took part in a major questionnaire survey in spring 1983. As part of that survey, the project team were giving the opportunity of asking a number of questions concerning student finance, and this has now made it possible to shed light on the following problems:

a. What do compulsory school pupils know about the grants and loans available before they decide to enter upper secondary school?
b. What relations exist between study difficulties in upper secondary school and financial problems?
c. To what extent do upper secondary school students combine gainful employment with their studies?
d. To what extent does State loan-grant assistance influence upper secondary school students in their decision to commence or refrain from higher studies?

The questionnaire data were delivered to the project team at the beginning of 1984. Data processing is under way and the initial findings will be published in the near future.

During the 1982/83 school year, a questionnaire survey was also conducted at Mölndal Upper Secondary School. Questions dealt with in that survey include the following:

- How far does the State student grant influence decisions to enter upper secondary school?
- What is the financial importance of the student grant to the student?
- Who controls the student grant - the student himself and/or his family?
- Why do some students work concurrently with their studies - is this gainful employment economically necessary?

The first report on this investigation was published in April 1984 (Kristiansson & Persson, 1984) and describes the situation among students in 3- and 4-year lines of upper secondary school. The findings can be briefly summarised as follows.

The State student grant, which in the 1982/83 school year amounted to SEK 250 monthly, does not appear to have swayed students in favour of entering a 3- or 4-year line of upper secondary school. Practically all the students say that they would have gone in for the same studies even if no grant had existed. This, however, does not mean that they consider the grant unimportant. On the contrary, a definite majority state that it means quite a lot or a very great deal to them and/or their families in financial terms. It is also interesting to note that girls tend more than boys to have the grant placed at their personal disposal, and that this independence causes them to put a still higher value on the grant. On the other hand there are no great differences in this respect between students with different social backgrounds.

The survey also shows that gainful employment is relatively common in conjunction with studies. Nearly 50% of the students have some form of

extra work in termtime. Generally they work relatively few hours, but there are occasional instances of students working up to 20 hours per week. Gainful employment on this scale in conjunction with full-time studies must constitute an excessive workload and must obviously have a prejudicial effect on school work. This unduly widespread "moonlighting" could probably be counteracted by making certain improvements to the State grant.

The second report on the Mölndal Upper Secondary School students, to be released in September 1984, deals with students taking the 2-year lines. The results show that in these lines too, the student grant has done little to influence the decision to carry on studying after compulsory school. Over 90% of the respondents state that they would have gone on to upper secondary school even without a student grant. A larger grant, though, could have induced a slightly larger number to enter a longer line of studies, since when asked WOULD YOU HAVE ENTERED A 3- OR 4-YEAR LINE IF THE STUDENT GRANT HAD BEEN LARGER? more than 10% replied YES, DEFINITELY or YES, PROBABLY, and these answers are more commonly given by students from lower social classes. Here as in the other lines, many students (50% in higher and 65% in lower social classes) state that the grant is financially important to their family. In the 2-year lines as well, it is the female students who are most often given a free hand in spending the grant.

Gainful employment conjointly with education is just as common here as in the 3- and 4-year lines. In reply to the question WHY ARE YOU GAINFULLY EMPLOYED? however, a larger number of students in 2-year lines state that they have to contribute towards their upkeep, and this applies particularly to students from a lower social class. This finding points to the desirability of introducing not only a larger but also a more selective student grant so as to make more provision for the students whose need is greatest.

Adult study assistance

Within that part of the project which is concerned with adult study assistance, the project team are collaborating with an adult education

research group at the Stockholm Institute of Education. In our department, the main emphasis is on the student-financial aspects of the 1975 adult education reform.

The first year began with a review of a large number of surveys, Government Bills, reports and available statistics. The results were presented in a report by Lundquist (1983). The principal findings can be summarised as follows.

- The difference between the average monthly earnings of male industrial workers and the maximum rate of special adult study assistance has gradually increased. In the spring term 1982 the maximum amount of assistance fell short of average monthly earnings by 30%.
- Loan-grant assistance, which has mainly been designed with the situation of young students in mind, provides more money than special adult study assistance in most cases where students with children are concerned.
- Special adult study assistance has had a positive impact on the recruitment of undereducated persons, especially women, for education.
- Hourly study assistance, on the other hand, has not appreciably augmented the recruitment of undereducated persons.
- If adult study assistance is to play a more important part, the rules will have to be made more flexible.

The second year was mainly devoted to studying the utilisation of special adult study assistance. A report, Lundquist & Öberg (1984), has been compiled in association with the Central Study Assistance Committee (CSN). The findings can be summarised as follows.

The selective rules have been designed and applied in such a way that most of the recipients of special adult study assistance have been undereducated persons. Both at compulsory school and upper secondary school level, for example, recipients of this assistance have received less previous education than the average KOMVUX (municipal adult education) student.

Before studying, 40% had been employed full time and 40% part time, while 20% had not been economically active. Those who had been gainfully employed came principally from the nursing and care sector (30%) and from manufacturing industry (25%). Care professions were much more heavily represented than the rest of the labour market. The opposite applied to manufacturing industry.

In four cases out of every five, special adult study assistance has made good the loss of earnings sustained for the duration of studies. Great differences exist, however, in this respect between men and women. In the case of half of the men, the assistance failed to offset the loss of earnings.

Apart from special adult study assistance, the spouse's income appears to be an important prerequisite of educational activity, even in the case of persons obtaining special assistance.

Although 80% of those who were awarded support obtained or could have obtained an amount making good their loss of earnings, over 70% felt that they were worse off while studying than they had been previously. This is because 50% only drew their grants, while refraining for various reasons from drawing the loans to which they were entitled.

Most of the persons receiving special adult study assistance began studying. Over 80% of those who began studying completed their studies. Those who received special adult study assistance had very strong vocational motives. Their objective was to obtain (25%) or change (50%) jobs. After 3.5 years, half of them had achieved the intended change in their occupational situation, and many of the remainder were still studying.

During the coming year we propose to study the differences existing between KOMVUX students financing their studies in various ways, and we will also investigate the influence of different forms of finance on educational achievement.

MATERIAL COMPILED UNDER AND IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROJECT

(In Swedish)

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Svensson, A (1983). Recruitment for upper secondary schooling. Developments during the first 15 years of State study support. Reports from the Department of Education, University of Göteborg, 1983:03.

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